Best practices for effective designs in election administration

Section 1: Overview

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U.S. Election Assistance Commission

Contents

Project purpose

In 2005, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) launched a research and design study with the organization Design for Democracy to identify a common system of Election Day materials ("best practices") to support election officials in their effort to improve voting experiences in their counties and states.

The best practices specified in this document support election reform requirements for ballot design and publicly posted voting information as mandated by sections 241(b)(2) and 302(b) of the 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA). These sections include

- Ballot designs for elections for Federal office
- Public posting of sample ballots on Election Day
- Public posting of election date and hours on Election Day
- Public posting of voting instructions, including for provisional ballots, on Election Day
- Public posting of instructions for first-time voters and mail-in registrants on Election Day
- Public posting of voting rights, including provisional ballot rights, official contacts for suspected rights violations, and legislative information on misrepresentation and fraud on Election Day

Election officials and their vendors should rely on the design recommendations in this document to produce HAVA- and Voluntary Voting System Guidelines (VVSG)-compliant election materials.

Methodology

To meet the requirements of the project, the development team followed an iterative research-design-evaluate process focused on gathering qualitative data from three core research audiences (voters, election officials and subject matter experts with accessibility and/or election backgrounds) to collect findings, design best practice prototypes, and draft specifications.

Input from manufacturers of voting technologies was also sought—ultimately, collaboration with just one national vendor, Election Systems & Software (ES&S), was provided in the context of a 2006 General Election pilot study the contractor conducted in Nebraska (see Research report, section 6). Without partnering directly with voting manufacturers, best practice recommendations are limited to interface design solutions—sound design and physical design solutions, specifically, are not addressed for audiences requiring them.

Data from the project's nine formal research events is documents in the section 7 Research report. In summary, the range of research activities included

— *Observing elections.* In 2006, the contract team observed primary elections in two New Jersey jurisdictions (rural and urban). They also observed general elections in two of Nebraska's rural counties while pilot testing localized optical scan ballots and voter information prototypes.

— *Conducting surveys.* Feedback was solicited from Nebraska voters to quantify the success of our pilot tests during the November 2006 general elections. Experts and officials also received questionnaires for reviews of our election prototypes.

— *Conducting field interviews.* Conversations were conducted with election officials in their work environments when possible. Informal interviews with poll workers and election staff at primary and general elections also informed our decisions*Consulting experts*

— *Consulting experts.* Input from a variety of language, literacy, usability, accessibility and production experts representing a range of voter interests was collected. Election officials with both state and local responsibilities representing populations diverse in culture, language, population density and income were interviewed. For production insights, the research team contacted the largest domestic manufacturers of commonly used election equipment. Alternate language studies addressed usability and readability needs for single and dual-language prototypes.

— *Reviewing legacy and in-use materials.* Ballot examples from the United States and overseas were studied to understand how common challenges, particularly low-literacy issues, are addressed.

— *Conducting usability evaluations.* The contract team held 54 usability evaluations with voters in seven states using prototype samples in interview settings. In-context voting feedback revealed how users actually thought and behaved while interacting with evaluation materials. More than 500 survey responses were also collected from pilot test voters in Nebraska (see Research report, section 6).

— *Focusing on prevalent voting technologies.* Specifications for optical scan and DRE ballot formats, and a voter information system exceeding minimum HAVA requirements, have been detailed in this report. By extension, full-face ballot specifications were extracted from optical scan research findings.

How to read this document

This document is divided eight sections and two main formats:

— Overview (section 1)

— Design specifications for ballots and voter information (sections 2-5)

— Research reports detailing nine events and one case study (sections 6-7)

— Appendix (section 8)

All design templates are available for download in editable and non-editable file formats at www.eac.gov/filename.